

Who Is God And What Is Man?

Psalm 90

Introduction: 1) “The same yesterday, today and forever.” (Heb. 13:8). “For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14).

Two profound, yet very different statements: One, the first, is appropriately applied to our God who is described in Psalm 90:1 as “from everlasting to everlasting.” The second, is appropriately applied to man, concerning whom v. 3 says is returned to the dust. God is forever. Man is “dust in the wind.” Puts things in perspective does it not?

2) – Psalm 90 is the first psalm of book 4 of the Psalter (Psalms 90-106).

- Kidner notes that Book I (1-41) tends to be personal, Book II (42-72) and Book III (73-89) tend to be national, and Book IV (90-106) and Book V (107-150) are more liturgical.
- In book IV, the name Yahweh or Jehovah is prominent.
- Most of the psalms are anonymous, though Ps. 90 is attributed to Moses, and Pss. 101 & 103 to David.
- Psalm 90, written by Moses, is the oldest psalm. Moses also wrote at least 2 other songs: Ex. 15:1-18 and Deut. 32:1-43.
- This psalm inspired Isaac Watts to write “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past.”
- It is a psalm of praise (1-2), lament (3-12) and prayer (13-17).
- Portions of it are often read at funerals as it highlights man’s mortality.
- James Boice provides a wonderful synopsis: “Psalm 90 is a reflection on human mortality and the brevity of life, plus quiet confidence in God who is the steadfast

hope of the righteous. This psalm is probably the greatest passage in the Bible contrasting the grandeur of God with man's frailty" (p. 741).

Transition: What then, are the specifics that the great father of the Hebrew faith, Moses, would have us learn about the greatness of God and the weakness of man? In plain, sober and realistic language 4 lessons are placed before us for our most careful consideration.

I. Remember that the Lord is eternal. 90:1-2

- The psalm begins with a majestic affirmation of the awesomeness of our God, our Lord (*Adonai*) the word means Master. It emp. His sovereignty and right to command and rule in our lives.
- It comes from Moses, described in the superscription as "the man of God."

1) Let the Lord be your refuge. 90:1

- In an affirming word of confidence God is said to be our "dwelling place" or "refuge" in all generations. A place of rest and refreshment, a home and a haven, God has been there for His people.
- Generations come and go, but God remains constant in His concern and care for His children.
- "Come home, come home, ye who are weary come home" to the God who would be your refuge.

2) Trust in the Lord forever. 90:2

- The reason the Lord can be a refuge in all generations is explained in v. 2. He has always existed. He is always there. There has never been a time when He was not! He is the God of the past, the present and the future.

- Before mountains came into existence or the earth and world took shape (was formed or given birth) you were there as God, “from everlasting to everlasting.”
- You and you alone are God. All other gods are mere fakes, shams, worthless and lifeless idols.
- You are the one who reveals Himself in Jesus who is “the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

II. Remember that man is temporal.

90:3-6

- God is great and we are not.

God is awesome and we are not.

Verse 3-6 and 7-12 will not make you feel good about yourself. They do not fit well into a man centered philosophy or prosperity theology that says you should seek “your best life now” and “become a better you.” Such a message may give hope, but it is a false hope and a pipe dream destined to disappoint.

- We are here today and gone tomorrow. The psalmist says prepare for eternity. Don’t play the fool and focus on the now! Why?

1) Do not forget you have a date with death. 90:3

- With echoes of Gen. 3:19 ringing in our ears (“From dust you are, and to dust you shall return”), we are reminded of our frailty and finiteness.
- In stark contrast to our Lord God, we are informed that we have a destiny with dust, with death.
 - God turns us “back to dust (*NIV*).
 - Indeed He commands us “return O sons of men” (*beni adam*).

- We are weak and we are brief. We are only a moment. A vapor, dust in the winds of time. Death is certain. God is forever and we are not. Death is real. Will you be ready when it comes?

2) Do not forget you have a limited time of life. 90:4-6

- Time for God and man is not the same. In fact there is no real comparison.
- From the Lord's eternal perspective, a thousand years is like a single 24 hour period that quickly passes and is gone. (v.4).
- No, it is less than that. It is like "a watch in the night" (v.4), a short 3 hour period of time." You think you will live forever and that death will never come. Then suddenly the grim reaper appears at your door or beside your bed. O what foolish humans we can be!
- V. 5: "You [God] carry them away like a flood." Suddenly without warning we are gone and we sleep the sleep of death.
- Vs. 5-6: we are like morning grass that sprouts quickly and looks so vibrant, but by evening "it is cut down & withers", gone forever without memory or a second thought.
- Van Gemeren: "Even when man lived to a thousand years – Methuselah lived 969 years (Gen. 5:27), in God's reckoning it is but a day or, even less, a watch in the night... Each human being is a drop in the giant stream of time" (p. 594).
- Amazingly many don't get it. We are like the fool of Luke 12:16-21, "Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down

my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.
 ‘And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”’ “But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Transition: You have a date with death. You have a limited time of life.

III. Remember that man is sinful.

90:7-12

- Sometimes I am asked, “is it normal to fear death, especially for the Christian?” After all the Bible says “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8).
- I believe the answer is yes, because death was never our divinely intended destiny. It is an un-welcomed intruder into human history. It is an un-desired, but well deserved antagonist.
- Kidner says it so well: “Its universal shadow is a standing reminder of our human solidarity in sin and of the serious with which God views this” (p. 329).
- Why is there death? Human sin and divine justice are the answers.
- Verses 7-12 flow naturally and theologically from vs. 3-6. Three aspects of our sinfulness are brought to light.

1) God will judge our sin.

90:7-8

- Why is there death and eternal judgment? Because the wrath of God, His steady and constant opposition to sin, consumes us. In v. 7 it is described as His anger and His wrath (cf. 9, 11).

- Further, He sees and knows all our sin, down to the very last one. Our iniquities (our unbelief, rebellion, disobedience and idolatries) are before His bar of justice.
- Further still, our secret sins, the things we do in the privacy of our thought life and personal life are in plain view in the light of His “countenance” (*NIV*, *NASV*, “presence”). Such a reality is a comfort on the one hand (only He sees it all) and it is terrifying on the other (He sees it all).
- Sin’s penalty required God to crush His Son (Is. 53:10). God takes sin seriously. He will judge our sin.

2) **God will measure our lives.**

90:9-10

- These verses develop the theme of vs. 3-6. Our days are quick, even shortened, because of God’s judgment on sin. They simply “pass away” like a cold winter’s night that never returns. Our years come to an end like a “sigh” or “moan” (*NIV*). How brief is that?!
- Moses notes that a normal life can be measured to about 70 years, and an extended life about 80. However, don’t miss the point. The emphasis is not on the length of life but the shortness of life. What is 70 or even 80 years in comparison to “forever?”
- Some may boast of their old age and good health, but when, if, you get there, you will discover sin has brought “trouble and sorrow” (*NIV*), hard work (labor) and disappointment, and then death as we are “soon cut off and [then] fly away” never to be seen or heard from again in this world.

- This is how God measures the life of the man or woman without Christ. Oh how different is the witness of the Christian who can say with Paul, “for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). Jesus really does make all the difference.

3) **God will teach us wisdom.**

90:11-12

- The brilliant American theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) in his resolutions said:
 - Resolved, Never to lose one moment of time; but improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.
 - Resolved, To live with all my might, while I do live.
 - Resolved, Never to do any thing, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.
 - Resolved, To think much on all occasions of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death.
 - Resolved, That I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.

Such a perspective on life grows out of a biblical and spiritual wisdom whereby God: 1) teaches us to number our days and 2) enables us to gain a heart of wisdom.

- To number our days is to acknowledge our finiteness and mortality and frailty. In the flash of a moment it can all be over and come to an end. In a second I can be ushered into eternity and the presence of God. Will I look back on my life with joy or sadness, gladness or grief? Oh how we need a heart of wisdom

to see life as our Lord sees it. Oh how we need Christ who is “for us wisdom from God” (1 Cor. 1:30).

IV. Remember that the Lord is merciful. 90:13-17

- This 4th and final stanza is a prayer for the Lord’s mercy, His *hesed* (v. 14), His unfailing love and covenant faithfulness. The text is peppered with strong and passionate request of Yahweh (Jehovah).

1) We should long for His mercy. 90:13-15

- Sometimes God’s people can become overwhelmed with their sin and God’s judgment. Apart from His grace we have no hope, no future. Moses thus asks the Lord to return and delay no longer, but to return with compassion for those who serve Him. Our sin deserves punishment and wrath. Only His kindness and compassion can deliver us from what we deserve.
- Building on God’s compassion, we can request His mercy or “unfailing love” (*NIV*). Here we receive a triple blessing: 1) satisfaction, 2) rejoicing, and 3) gladness. Such joy and gladness and satisfaction will accompany us “all our days” (v. 14), even in those days when the Lord has “afflicted us” (v. 15) and “we have seen evil” (v. 15). Here is the anticipation of Rom. 8:18-30.
- Our souls are satisfied only in the Lord.
Our souls can truly rejoice only in the Lord.
Our souls can be made glad only in the Lord.
- When it is all said and done, what we need, all we need is found in our Lord.

2) We should look for His glory. 90:16

- Philippians 1:6 says, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Perhaps Paul was reflecting on Psalm 90:16 when he wrote these words.
- That which is done for self will perish. That which is done by God in us will last and...reveal the glory of God in and thru and to His children. His work of salvation, sanctification, glorification will redound to His praise and glory, not ours.
- It will be God’s best life now and forever. Now that is a life worth living. Oh to see God’s works and His glory put on display rather than our iniquities and secret sins (v. 8). That is a picture show I will gladly go and see.

3) We should live for His beauty.

90:17

- Verse 17 builds on v. 16. “His works...His glory...His beauty.” His works are made visible in our works, what our text calls “the work of our hands” (repeated for emphasis).
- “Beauty” could be rendered “favor.” (*NIV, NASV*). Life lived only under the sun (*Ecclesiastes*) may be vanity. Life lived under the Lordship of God, of Jesus Christ, has purpose and meaning. Amazingly what is temporal can become eternal. How? When it is established by God! He can take the weak and make it strong, the finite and make it everlasting, the fleeting and make it lasting. Do you want a life that will count and count for eternity? Here it is for the taking! Go for it!!

Conclusion:

“Our God, Our Help in Ages Past”
By Isaac Watts, 1674-1748

1. Our God, our Help in ages past,
Our Hope for years to come,
Our Shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal Home!

2. Under the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,
And our defense is sure.

3. Before the hills in order stood
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting Thou art God,
To endless years the same.

4. A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone,
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

5. Thy word commands our flesh to dust:
"Return ye sons of men!"
All nations rose from earth at first
And turn to earth again.

6. Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

7. Like flowery fields the nations stand,
Pleased with the morning light;
The flowers beneath the mower's hand
Lie withering ere 'tis night.

8. Our God, our Help in ages past,
Our Hope for years to come,
Be Thou our Guard while troubles last
And our eternal Home!